



A Dating Story . . .

# Mississippi - Style



**By 2nd Lt. Christian Patterson**

Chief Warrant Officer Two Brian Sanders of Company D, 185th Aviation Group (-) (AG) is use to being the victim of practical jokes. Whether it's accidentally sitting on a "whoopee" cushion or receiving a prank call, he has just about experienced them all during his military career.

This past April, however, he received a phone call that he thought was too good to be true. The caller said that she was from Philadelphia, and that she wanted to film him on a blind date to air on national television.

Immediately Sanders thought it was a joke. Surely there aren't any film crews in Philadelphia, Miss., right? That's true, but the 185th AG MH-60 Blackhawk pilot learned very quickly that it was actually Philadelphia, Pa. and that her request was sincere.

The caller was Suzette Brown, an associate producer with the Banyan Productions Company. She was determined to have Sanders appear on a special military episode of "A Dating Story." The program airs on The Learning Channel (TLC) week-days from noon to 1 p.m. central time.

"Banyan Productions is based out of Philadelphia, Pa., and we produce reality based television shows for TLC, the Discovery Channel and various other networks," said Dan Krueger, the producer of this episode of 'A Dating Story'. "We thought that Tammy and Brian would hit it off and that's why

we're down here in Mississippi."

Sanders didn't expect to be selected for a televised blind date. To say the least, he was amazed regarding the offer.

"I couldn't believe it at first," said Sanders. "But after talking to Suzette I was convinced that she was telling me the truth. It's an opportunity that only comes once in a lifetime."

Sanders agreed to participate in the shoot, but not before a few questions for Brown. The first and most obvious: Who am I going out with? The answer, Navy Lieutenant Tammy Mediate. She's a search and rescue helicopter pilot at Meridian Naval Air Station (N.A.S.).

"I found Mediate on an episode of 'Regis and Kelly,'" said Brown. "They were doing a show entitled, 'Women in Uniform' makeovers. I thought her segment was the most interesting because of the fact that she's a female helicopter pilot. I called her and she decided to be on our show."

Brown's quest to find Mediate was easy, but it was quite a challenge to locate the right person as her date. The matchmaker made nearly seventy phone calls, searched ten states—from Colorado to Maryland and combed the Air Force to Civil Air Patrols looking for "the one."

According to Mediate, "the one" had to be an officer and a Christian. After two weeks, Brown's search for a person with those qualities ended up at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi.

She was told that their weren't any single male officers there, but her luck might be better if she called the 185th AG at Hawkins Field in Jackson.

Staff Sgt. Melanie Britton, a secretary at the aviation facility, answered the call from Brown. She also thought that Brown's request was a hoax. When Britton figured out that it wasn't, she had the perfect person in mind, Sanders. Britton put Brown in touch with him immediately.

"He told me that his time is divided between work and church," said Brown. "That's great because Mediate wants someone who is a Christian. After talking to him, I realized that they had so much in common and that I just had to set them up on a date."

Now that Brown had a couple, it was time to make arrangements for the show. The spunky associate producer spent a tremendous amount of time laying the plans for the operation. She was responsible for air travel to Mississippi, hiring freelance videographers, meals, communication with the National Guard and the Navy, and many other logistical functions. A certain second lieutenant attempted to recruit her into one of the logistics and support units of the Mississippi Army National Guard, but he was unsuccessful. There will be no recruiting ribbon for him.

After the plans were set, a few weeks of anticipation passed before the actual date. Over that time, both

Sanders and Mediate conducted their own "pre-date" reconnaissance missions. Sanders had a friend to meet Mediate. The Navy pilot followed suit by talking with a church member who knew Sanders to learn more information about him. Overall, they were both pleased with the data collected during their missions and all of a sudden date week was upon them.

The first two days were dedicated to covering the couple's everyday lives. The Banyan Productions camera crews covered Sanders and Mediate's every move from sun-up to sun-down. This was done to help the viewers to really get to know the service members and to show what their days are like at home, on the job and in-and-around town. After this was completed, the date was next.

The date was on June 23rd. Sanders arrived at Hawkins Field early that morning and boarded his Blackhawk helicopter for Meridian N.A.S. When he arrived, Sanders met Mediate on the airfield with numerous onlookers. After they talked for a bit, they were separated and interviewed. They both were asked to describe their first impression of their date.

"Tammy seems like a nice person," said Sanders. "She's definitely someone that I'd like to get to know better."

"Brian made a great impression. He came across as very sweet, confident, and considerate," Mediate said with a grin. "I could tell immediately

that he's a great guy."

As the two broke the ice, it was the beginning of a full day of activities. The pair soon left for the ranch at Meridian N.A.S. for a half-a-day's worth of horseback riding. "Leo" and "Star" were the two lucky horses that carried the couple during their ride on the trails at the base. It was easy to tell



**LIGHTS-CAMERA-ACTION!** Navy Lt. Tammy Mediate talks with Chief Warrant Officer Two Brian Sanders of Company D, 185th Aviation Group (-). The two were discussing their date plans at Meridian Naval Air Station during a special military episode of "A Dating Story." Photo by Jerry Antone, V.I.S.C., N.A.S., Meridian, Miss.

afterwards that the chemistry between the two was beginning to gel. However, it wasn't totally due to the fact that they are both military aviators.

"I think that having in common that we're helicopter pilots isn't the most important thing," said Mediate. "I feel that our other similarities are strong as well, but I think the best thing is that we're Christians."

"I learned that her father was a pilot in Vietnam and about her whole family," said Sanders. With a boyish grin he added, "She's really cute too!"

Following the horseback riding session was a picnic lunch at Merre Hope, a 20-room Neoclassical Revival mansion near downtown Meridian. It was the former headquarters for Gen.

Joseph E. Johnston in 1863 during the Civil War. The pair got one last chance to get to know each other better as the Banyan crews recorded their conversation.

After the bite to eat, it was time for Sanders to head back to the base to and then to Hawkins Field in Jackson. Final interviews were recorded and

soon he was on the flight line ready for take off. As they said their goodbyes, it was obvious to all that the pair would see each other again.

"I think they really like each other," said Brown with a boast. "It seems that my match-making skills worked out well this time."

In fact, her skills have turned out to be outstanding. The couple has talked on several occasions since the date and are planning a trip together in the near future. The pair's date will air this Fall on TLC.

Will this lead to wedding bells and a white picket fence? We'll keep you posted if they plan to appear on "A Wedding Story."



Not the end . . .